KATE CAREW GAZES HER ECSTATIC FILL ON A POST-CUBIST

The American Studies "Sublime Elementalism" in the Presence of No Less Lofty a Post-Impressionist than Picasso, Follower of Matisse, Forerunner of Heaven Alone Knows What in the Field of "Advanced Art."

The Youthful, Attractive Spaniard Proves Shy and Retiring, but Prolific of "Ohs!" and Irritable Only When His Pictures Are Discussed—His Visitor Proves Lucky in Guessing Meaning of Certain Paintings.

BY KATE CAREW.

Paris, March 29.

COME a little nearer and look very intelligent and soulful, dear ones, for we are going to talk somewhat of the return to "Sublime Elementalism."

Rolls out rather well, doesn't it?

By this time you are busy discussing it among yourselves, anyhow, I imagine, and you're having heated arguments as to whether it is really the "heart of painting" or an "insult to the intelligence," because, of course, They are in your midst now, or, rather, They have sent over expressions of Themselves for you to see and judge en masse.

Still, in case you don't follow me I'll tell you at once what I mean by It and They.

It is Post-Impressionism and They are the Post-Impressionists!

In Paris we are saturated with it!

GET IT ON ALL SIDES.

Vulgarly speaking, we lap it up everywhere. We talk of it in the salons, we laugh at it on the boulevards and we quarrel over it in the cafés.

Yes, it's everywhere; in everything.

It's insidious. It's stealthy!

It is influencing ideas, clothes, literature and house decoration. If it continues we'll all be talking in words of one syllable, and goodness knows what we will look like. Certainly, brand new ideals of beauty will come into vogue.

It has wakened the "Boule Miche" to a conversational era, like to that historic time when Verlaine and his followers used to hold frequenters of the cafés spellbound with their wild ideas and wilder talk of them.

Now it is eager-eyed young men who have their favorite tables, and who hold forth for and against the New Movement in Art.

They are awfully emphatic, awfully in earnest and crazy to fling out words, words, words!

In fact, I don't see how they have time for anything else in the way of painting or writing, for they're so busy chatting and orating.

I've studied the Post-Impressionists, the Cubists and the Futurists. I've been as painstaking as an eager child in groping for points of view, but I'm still in the dark. I can't get into the spirit of it.

Maybe I'm old-fashioned, behind the times and all that, but there it is. You know the worst.

And yet I am not quite so hopelessly vague about it all as I was, for I've met a Post-Impressionist, one of the leading ones, and from a casual study of him I have advanced a step or two—in knowledge.

PAINTING SOUL OF TANGIER.

I yearned to encounter Matisse, but that was out of the question, for he has left Paris and is down in Tangier, painting the soul of it in red and yellow, I expect.

The next was Picasso.

Picasso, who paints in cubes from choice, who sees souls in cubes, who used to picture normal men and women and then suddenly took to the cubic system as a means of expression.

Picasso, the follower of Matisse, the forerunner of heaven only knows what in art.

Picasso could be seen, said those who knew him, but it was difficult. He was shy, retiring and mute, especially on the subject of his pictures. "Don't," they added, "don't speak of his pictures, whatever else you say!"

"Why, what will happen? Will he simply turn and tear me limb from limb, or will he flee my baleful presence?" I asked with a perfectly natural curiosity.

"Oh, no," they said in chorus, "nothing like that; but it irritates him."

Now does that seem a natural trait?

It doesn't irritate me a bit to have you talk to me or write me about my pictures. You can always say just what you like or don't like.

But, of course, I crossed my heart and swore three times that I would be on my best non-interviewing behavior. I would have a simple chat with the timid, nervous one and, like the walrus, I would talk of many things, but never a Picasso painting.

I'd merely study the type of man who paints Buffalo Bill in blocks which look like slate roofs or any old odds and ends and puts Kubelik in isosclies triangles or whatever it pleases you to call them.

I'd only seek for the soul of him and see whether he is spoofing us, or whether he really expects us to find something inspiring in his picture puzzles.

POST-IMPRESSIONIST STUDIO.

Our meeting, so pregnant with possibilities, was in a studio, a post-impressionist studio, owned by an American who buys post-impressionist paintings for sheer love of them.

It was a great, long, low room, with windows high up toward the ceiling, delightful bits of shabby, old-fashioned furniture, carved chests with handmade locks, odd little tables and quaint high backed chairs.

And the walls were given over to Picasso pictures.

No, that is an exaggeration.

There were several of Matisse's efforts as well, and there was a Cezanne and, really, so rapidly has the movement hopped along, the Cezanne, a nude, misshapen woman, looked quite a simple and old-fashioned affair among these later works.

I got there early, and the Picasso had not yet come, so I had a chance to saturate myself again in his style.

There were some earlier things of his to be seen—a pretty, slender, little girl in the altogether, bearing a small bunch of flowers, and a woman lying on a couch. There were one or two portraits and some studies.

Then commenced the cubic period.

I cannot dwell on those, for I don't know how to describe them, but one huge canvas fascinated me. On it were two enormous red figures all divided into sections.

I should so like to know what they meant to him, but I never shall, for I wasn't allowed to ask Picasso, and I don't think anybody else could explain it at all.

"Tell me," I said to the Hostess. "Do you understand them?" And I gave a comprehensive wave of my hand.

"Oh, yes."

EARNEST, UNAVAILING PLEA.

"Then do give me the key," I pleaded. "I've got an open mind. I like new movements. I believe they all make for progress. I may become a disciple of the school if only I can get an idea what it all means."

But she simply said sweetly, and with a slight superiority, methought:

"My dear girl, one can't explain these things. You must simply find them for yourself."

"But don't you sometimes have to ask him for the first inkling as to what he is striving after in his work?" I pursued, feeling so ignorant and uncouth.

"No," she replied, "dear me, no! I always understand, of course."

I was out in the cold. That was all there was to it, and me with such an eager, inquiring, young mind, too!

I looked at the biggest Matisse.

I COULDN'T EVEN LOCATE THE SOUL OF BUFFALO BILL.

It showed gentlemen and ladies old enough to know better, very lightly clad for the time of year or any time of year.

They appeared to be eating fruit and thinking.

"Anything to do with the Garden of Eden?" I inquired, tentatively.

It had.

My first step in the right direction. I was getting on, and my head swelled a little.

Thus encouraged, I progressed still further. I went and squinted at some pink and blue and yellow chrysanthemum-like splotches.

"Do you know," I said dreamily, "I seem to get a kind of Japanese feeling here," and I put my head a trifle to the side and gazed.

"There you are!" exclaimed my hostess triumphantly. "That's just it. That's what I mean. One can't explain these things—one must feel. One must not look for details, one must get an impression, an emotion. That is a portrait of Matisse's wife in her Japanese kimono."

It seemed to have been an excellent guess. I was in luck.

CAUGHT THE KIMONO, ANYWAY.

Now, between ourselves, I never did find Mme. Matisse in the picture, but I am practically sure that I traced the kimono; I found that among the chrysanthemum splashes.

My stock jumped up with alacrity after that brilliant effort. I was treated as an equal.

One or two others strolled into the studio, for it is a delightful, informal meeting place for those who have ideas. You just lift the latch and walk in and you find yourself among congenial—if argumentative—spirits.

If you haven't got ideas, you never discover the way there, for no one ever tells you about it.

Well, the last time the latch lifted it was Picasso who entered and stood in the doorway blinking at us in the glare of the electric light.

I DON'T KNOW WHETHER PICASSO WAS SEEING ME IN CUBES AND SQUARES.

No; it is the very handsome face of a simple, sincere artist, without much sense of humor, perhaps, but with conviction and strength.

How he can ever paint such ugly figures as he does, when he has only to look in a mirror, copy what he sees, and turn out something worth the trouble, I can't understand.

His clothes were still another contradiction. They were well built and quite American in cut—that is, they were sort of loose and baggy and square in the shoulders.

He wore a sack coat suit of a warm brown, that golden brown tint the leaves take on in autumn, a black cravat most carefully tied, and a quite irreproachable collar.

Not a touch of the bohemian here. Those clothes might have just come from the Stock Exchange or an afternoon at the Country Club.

I gazed from this nice, neat, little man to those conceptions of his brain and works of his hands which hung all around me, and I couldn't make things fit at all.

A BETRAYAL OF CONFIDENCE.

I consider that Post-Impressionists ought to live up to their pictures. It is not fair that they should go around looking quite normal and natural when they are trying to make us see things in abnormal fashion.

Oh, how I wanted to tell him all this—and here was I on my word of honor and my best behavior!

The dog walked right along with his master, and when the artist ensconced himself in a high-back chair and tucked his feet up on one of the rungs, doggie stretched out in front and gazed up at him in canine adoration.

Will he ever have the heart to paint that faithful dog soul in cubes and squares?

I didn't find Picasso an easy man to engage in conversation—possibly because I was so limited in what I was to be allowed to say to him. I suppose I stared rather hard at him for a few seconds, but he didn't seem to mind a bit, he just returned the look with a direct glance from his bright, brown eyes.

A TRIFLING MISTAKE.

"What a lovely dog!" I gushed, for a beginning. "What kind is he?"

He put me right at once.

"I don't really know what kind," he responded, "but 'he' happens to be a female."

Just "Oh!" from Katie.

Then another heavy pause fell between us, and I furtively gazed at the pictures and then at him.

Dared I?

My dears, he has the soul of a wizard, that man. He read my thoughts like an open book and he straightened up and frowned coldly upon me as he tossed back the errant lock of hair.

Then up came the Hostess in the nick of time, gracious and smiling.

"I've seen the report of the exhibition in New York," she informed him.

"Ah!" murmured Picasso in bored accents, exactly as if he hadn't anything in the show at all, and you know he has.

"Yes," she continued, "but it was a very short one, and there was no mention of you."

"Ah!" said Picasso, and the subject threatened to drop.

"I wonder what America will say to the pictures?" I queried, vivaciously, of no one in particular.

"Oh, I think people will say very little," volunteered the Hostess. "They won't dare. They'll be afraid of saying the wrong thing, of criticising adversely, lest they prove behind the times."

"Ah!" said Picasso, and the conviction reached me that he doesn't really care a bit what we say.

"I don't agree with you," I chimed in quickly, turning to the Hostess. "America dares express opinions for herself. She is not like England, who never discovers, but waits to be told what she must like and dislike. England was really funny during her first attack of Post-Impressionism.

"Yes," smiled the Hostess. "I remember that, and I remember one daring soul wanted to know why you had put a violin in the portrait of Kubelik."

Picasso smiled with evident enjoyment of this joke, and he showed two rows of strong, even, white teeth.

"How did you find England funny?" he asked, turning his head toward me and fixing me with those steadfast eyes.

He is exactly like a straightforward schoolboy when he asks a question.

WATCHING THEIR NEIGHBORS.

"Oh, I mean the English didn't like to commit themselves by criticism. They walked round and round the rooms in stolid silence, stealing furtive glances at their neighbors to see how they were affected."

"And you think Americans are different?" pursued Picasso.

"Yes, very. I think you can count upon them to give their opinions."

"Ah," said Picasso.

He had finished with the subject and with me for the present, so he dismissed us and leaned toward the Hostess, addressing her in his low, deep voice:

"I didn't get any tickets for the fight next week," he said. "They were too dear. I will get some-another time, when there is a less expensive fight going on."

I stared in surprise. One doesn't think of artists regularly attending prize-fights.

HER DESIRE EXPLAINED.

The Hostess explained.

"I want Monsieur Picasso to take me to a fight," she said. "I have wished to see a real one ever since I saw the cinema pictures of the big Johnson fight."

Picasso nodded solemnly.

"They were very pretty, those cinema pictures."

I looked at him.

He meant it; but, of course, you must remember the French often use the word pretty in the sense that we use nice.

"They were good, agreed the Hostess. "Oh, well, another time we'll surely arrange to go."

"Ah, yes," said Picasso.

I glanced at the picture above us. It was of a man, evidently an athlete or a fighter. He was clad in trunks and had huge, protruding muscles.

I should like to have said a word about this in connection with fighting, but there was my honor at stake; so I simply inquired discreetly whether the artist liked boxing.

"Ah, yes."

He never dilates on any subject you may notice.

"Did you ever have any ambition to be a professional boxer when you were a small boy?" I continued as animatedly as possible, considering the little encouragement I received.

He raised his eyebrows as if he wondered what possible interest this could have for me, but he answered in his serious way and in his Spanish-French, which is very sibilant and therefore a little difficult for me to follow.

"Ah, no; I always wanted to be a painter."

He put one of those prematurely aged little hands into the pocket of his coat and procured a long, slender pipe with a small, round bowl.

"May I?" he said, giving it a graceful wave.

"Of course."

He proceeded to fill it and light it with great deliberation.

"Did you begin to paint when you were very young?" I pursued, ruthlessly.

"Oh, yes, and always I was among painters. My father was one, and was connected with the Beaux-Arts in Barcelona, as well."

Then he took me over and showed me a picture. He didn't really ask me to go. He got up and I followed him and he pointed out a small painting with the stem of his pipe and explained that he did it when he was sixteen or seventeen years of age.

OF HIS EARLIER STYLE.

It was an effective little study of three figures and was full of grace and skill and he stood looking at it a moment with a sort of amused tolerance.

It belonged to a remote period in the history of his development.

Personally, I think it is a pity—but, of course, as I said, this is not an art criticism.

I couldn't pursue the subject further without straining a point of honor, so we went back to our chairs. I sat down, but he stood leaning over the tall back of his chair and puffed away at his pipe, while the dog, taking it as a signal, rose, shook herself, waited a moment, then settled down on the floor again.

I don't know whether Picasso was seeing me in cubes and squares, but he was certainly placing me as a type.

"What part of America is your home?" he asked suddenly.

"New York."

THAT SUFFRAGE "HIKE."

"Some of your women are walking to Vashington to ask for a vote," he informed me, solemnly. "For me I find that rather ridiculous. How many hours will it take them to get to Vashington?"

"Hours!" I exclaimed. "Why, it will take them days. I don't know how many, but several, certainly."

"Ah," and he puffed away at his pipe.

"Perhaps you also are a suffragette," he suggested.

"I am," I acknowledged, with pride, "or rather, I am a suffragist."

"And the difference?" he queried like a puzzled boy.

I explained it to the best of my ability.

"You do not break windows then, eh?" he questioned, gravely.

"Not many," I assured him cheerfully. "Have you any suffragettes in Spain, or don't you have any votes there, anyhow?"

THINKS SPAIN HAS NONE.

"Oh, yes, we have votes there," and he seemed shocked at my lack of knowledge of sunny Spain; "but I think there are no suffragettes, and I think I am glad."

"Well, there are places where women have the vote in America, you know," I told him.

"Yes, yes," he nodded. "California and Sydney, anyhow."

"Sydney! Why, Sydney isn't in America!" said I, much more shocked at his lack of knowledge of my country than he had been at mine.

"Ah," came through a thick haze of smoke.

"No, certainly not." I said almost severely; "Sydney is in Australia."

"Well, Reno is in America," he remarked, giving me a conciliating smile. "And, tell me, do you know this English suffragette family, this mother and her three daughters, Christabel and Chrysalis and Chrysonym?"

He laughed at this little joke on Pankhurst nomenclature.

I told him I did, and I painted them in Post-Impressionist style for him, because I saw that the woman of to-day is as great a mystery to his Spanish male mind as his pictures are to the world.

"You have one of the Pankhursts in Paris now," I said. "Christabel. Why don't you do a portrait of her?"

He took this quite seriously.

"I do not even know her," he replied, and he seemed to be considering how to remedy this; so if you ever see Christabel à la Post-Impressioniste you will know who first mothered the idea.

"A Frenchwoman, Madame Severine, wanted to be President of France," continued Picasso, with his delicious solemnity and the pipe clutched in one hand.

"No, not Madame Severine," I corrected him kindly. "A certain Madame Denise something or other, but she did not receive much encouragement."

"Ah," murmured Picasso.

"Have you ever been to England?" I asked him.

"No."

"Would you like to go?"

"I don't know; there is everything in Paris."

Note the simplicity of that.

Why go anywhere if you have everything at home?

It is so direct and easy, and that is just the way with Picasso himself. I shall never believe that he is anything but sincere. He has an idea. He works toward it. He cannot help it if people do not follow him, he says; he must pursue his course, and he does.

FRANK AND YET BAFFLING.

He seems interested in all things, and there is an inquiring note in his voice and a sympathy in his glance which make you want to tell him much. Then back of all the childlike directness and frankness there is a tantalizing shade of something you do not reach, a hint of ideas he cannot or will not express, a desire to go on alone, to keep the door of the innermost chamber closed. All that piques your curiosity to excess, and you long to search deeper, but, of course, if you are on your honor you can't.

The Hostess felt she had left us alone long enough, so she came up and commenced talking books, and behold! Picasso knew H. G. Wells and several other English writers, and for a Spaniard and a painter that is remarkable. I assure you the average Frenchman you meet could not give you a name in English literature of to-day, but, as I tell you, Picasso is a thinker and an inquirer.

Life is of interest to him. There is nothing jaded in his point of view, and the only thing which it rather bores him to discuss is art.

Possibly he pretends it bores him to protect himself. I am not sure about that, but I should think he is not subtle enough to keep up the subterfuge.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION.

I should be more inclined to suppose that it enthralls him to paint his weird imaginings and tires him to discuss them.

It was getting late in the evening and the room was thick with smoke. Picasso shook back the lock of hair, knocked the ashes out of his pipe on the hearthstone in a nice, neat fashion and murmured to the Hostess:

"It is now time I went home to bed. I am not a noctambula"—which means an all-nighter.

The dog rose solemnly and stood by her master, following him to the chair where he laid his hat.

Picasso wrapped a scarf around his throat, put on a heavy coat and was ready to face the elements.

"I am glad you are careful," said the Hostess. "You have been ill so much this winter."

"Ah, yes," agreed Picasso. "That is true—but now I am to be much better. Good night, madame; good night, mees," and he held out his hand to me.

"Good night," and I patted that great, beautiful dog on the head, but she had no eyes or instinct for me or for anybody there, only for the well loved master.

And the little painter and his big dog vanished into the night.

THE HOSTESS EXPLAINS.

"How could you put me on my honor not to talk to him about the pictures?" I protested, when the last idealist had vanished and we were alone in the big studio and nestling in front of the gleaming salamander. "I wouldn't have minded if he had been an ordinary personality, but he isn't, and a few skilful questions would have elucidated so much."

"No, really," she assured me. "You would simply have spoiled the evening, for Picasso would have become morose and wouldn't have talked at all."

"Perhaps you're right," I agreed humbly.

But I wish to say here that when next I meet a real live Post-Impressionist I am not going to be put off my usual bent. I am going to question him like a mother and find out a thing or two as to where he is going and whither he is taking us.

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PICASSO'S PORTRAIT OF KUBELIK.